

# Washington State Youth Summit: Connecting Cultures

Yakima and Mount Rainier National Park

July 10-13, 2012



## Summary of Summit: Washington State Youth Summit: Connecting Cultures

Over 50 students, educators, scholars, and preservation and community leaders from Washington State participated in the successful debut of the Washington State Youth Summit which took place July 10-13, 2012.

The 2012 Washington State Youth Summit: Connecting Cultures was presented by the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation, in partnership with and support from the National Park Foundation's American Latino Heritage Fund, the National Park Service, the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, the History Channel, and Library of Congress's Teaching with Primary Sources. Connecting Cultures was Washington State's first statewide Youth Summit focusing on preservation and heritage, and its success was demonstrated by the enthusiasm of the participants and the commitment of the organizers and several partners to continue the program into future years.

The Summit provided opportunities for 35 middle and high school students from around the state and six teachers to interact with and learn about the Latino heritage of the Yakima Valley and the natural landscape of nearby Mount Rainier National Park. Building on these experiences, the young participants developed recommendations that focused on three themes:

- 1) Advancing Appreciation of American Latino Culture and Heritage
- 2) Enhancing the Heritage Tourism Experience
- 3) Saving Historic Places That Matter

Participants shared their ideas for advancing experience-based learning opportunities and consulted with local leaders on the recently introduced American Latino Heritage Initiative. The Summit culminated in a moderated Town Hall Meeting during which students presented the recommendations they developed during the course of the Summit to a panel of community leaders, government officials and educators. The Town Hall was attended by students' family members, preservation advocates, National Park Service staff, dignitaries and elected officials.

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For many of the participants, the Washington State Youth Summit provided many powerful “first ever” experiences, perhaps for some, a first ever opportunity for public speaking. For some students from the west side of the state, it was their first ever visit to the Yakima Valley, which is steeped in Latino history and culture. For many participants, it was their first ever visit to the iconic Mount Rainier National Park—the park that inspired the National Park logo. Perhaps most importantly, it was also a “first-ever” experience for many students to learn about historic preservation and begin to understand how they could be involved in saving historic places and help advance an understanding and appreciation of heritage.

Notably, the Summit stimulated enthusiasm for student involvement in developing ideas and solutions, and then provided an opportunity for student voices and ideas to be heard. The student tackled ideas about how to better share, save, and understand our nation’s historic places, become stewards of our public lands, and make our National Parks more welcoming and accessible to underrepresented groups.

Highlights included:

- Opening Reception with presentations about Yakima Valley’s history and rich Latino heritage, local cuisine, and dance and music performances by members of the Yakima Nation
- Visit with the founder and program manager of KNDA, 91.5FM, the first Hispanic public radio station
- Visit with Rene Garcia, owner of G & G Orchards
- Visit to the historic Toppenish Murals that depict the struggles and successes of the Chicano movement in the Yakima Valley
- Opportunities for students to engage and network with preservation leaders and scholars and make new friends
- Interactive educational programs focused on stewardship and interpretation at Mount Rainier National Park led by enthusiastic, knowledgeable staff
- Service project clearing and rebuilding trails at Mount Rainier National Park
- Two nights at Packwood Station, a rustic camp-like facility that stimulated student interaction and collaboration at the base of Mount Rainier National Park
- Fireside discussions—an opportunity to share personal experiences and demonstrate the application of the Summit themes and ideas
- Final celebratory dinner with live music at the home of a local Packwood family on the banks of Skate Creek
- Presentation of recommendations at concluding Town Hall meeting held at the Mount Rainier Community Service Building at Longmire

The enthusiasm and genuine interest with which the students approached each activity was truly inspiring. They embraced the themes that were introduced and offered unfiltered ideas and stimulated fresh approaches to program implementation. Listed below are recommendations developed and presented by the students and thoughtful responses offered by panel members at the culminating Town Hall:

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## Town Hall Summary

**Question: The Youth Summit is part of the American Latino Heritage Initiative. What are the critical stories regarding Latino heritage in this region that should be shared with families in your community?**

### Youth Recommendations:

- The Latino culture is an integral yet underrepresented part of the Yakima Valley and its history. Stories of all people in the Valley should be represented, demonstrating that everyone is the same, searching for a happy and secure future. The story of the Yakima Valley should include the personal stories of the farmworkers, highlighting their working conditions and daily life. Radio KDNA is an important piece of the history, and its significance to the community needs to be communicated. The station motivated the farmworkers to stand for their rights in the face of injustice.

### Panel Responses:

- The Youth Summit has been helpful in making these stories personal, and is one example of helping advance cultural appreciation. A network needs to be set up to help give these stories a voice, and it may take the younger generation to create these connections, which can perhaps be achieved through the network of this Youth Summit. Immigration is a complicated topic, especially for this region, and although state and national agencies are working on increasing understanding, there is still much work to be done and barriers to cross.

**Question: What Places Can Help Tell Or Represent The Critical Stories?**

### Youth Recommendations:

- Students and leaders need to continue to research the places that best reflect the region's Hispanic legacy.

- The Yakima Valley Museum is a key place where these stories can be told, in the form of artifacts, murals, clothing and music. Representations of Latino culture should portray a variety of immigrants' experiences and show how the Latino families have adapted through their immigration. Radio KDNA could host special broadcasts about Latino history with stories from all around the state. KDNA itself, along with founder Ricardo Garcia, is a history to be recorded, perhaps through a documentary video. Stories could also be shared at Mt. Rainier National Park through bilingual podcasts and interactive kiosks. Parks, museums and other attractions should offer information in Spanish, especially when there is such a large Latino population nearby.

- Another example from the Youth Summit, G&G Orchards, also has histories to record, perhaps through oral interviews, about the owner, his family, the pickers, packers, and other workers. G&G and other orchards could help publish educational materials about the growing and harvesting processes, perhaps with posters or other visual study aids that explain the economic impact of the industry. Posters and materials at grocery stores can share the stories of the workers and explain how food goes from farm to table. Additionally, QR codes could be placed on produce stickers and boxes that would lead to a website sharing the stories of the farmers and workers that helped produce the food.

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## **Panel Responses:**

- Collecting the histories is an essential step, and this can be accomplished through service groups, high school students, and local college students. An essential way to engage young people is through social media and new technology, which are providing ever-increasing ways to collect stories and connect people back to the places that shaped their memory. Cultures survive when we tell others the story, and this needs to be done in the Yakima Valley.

## **Question: What Are The Challenges Or Obstacles To Demonstrating The Importance Of Latino Heritage And Culture In This Region?**

### **Youth Recommendations:**

- There are people inside the Latino culture who are unaware of Latino heritage. Latinos need to unite as a culture, gather together, and encourage the sharing of their heritage. People sometimes don't take the time to learn about their own heritage, and this generation of youth can become involved to change this. To help this process, there should be better funding for social studies and ethnic studies classes in schools. Additionally, after school programs which support ethnic studies, gathering together, and culturally-based activities would be beneficial.
- For encouraging heritage tourism to a Latino audience, we *must* advocate for more availability of Spanish language materials. We can encourage families to visit places that convey heritage and culture by reaching out through schools, community centers, and churches. More family-based activities and programs would help heritage tourism be appealing to Latinos.

## **Panel Responses:**

- The students should keep their Spanish language skills; it will be a huge asset to their future. Students should work with legislators to increase the amount of social studies classes offered in schools, and funding available for museums. Students can also work with their teachers to increase the study of local history within existing social study classes. After having attended the Youth Summit, students can promote similar extracurricular cultural programs, and work to get their peers interested and involved. Latinos can also exercise a voice in this country through their vote; it is essential to practice that right of citizenship.

## **Question: For The Yakima Valley And Mount Rainier National Park, How Can These Places Share The Latino Heritage AND Be Relevant To Latinos?**

### **Youth Recommendations:**

- Having bilingual information available is essential. Related websites should offer text in Spanish so all ages of Latino families can have access. Signs and other informational material at parks can have bar scanners so families can choose to view the information in Spanish on another device during their visit. The best way to appeal to Latino families and to get them to share their culture and stories is through a festival—food and families go together.
- It is important for the older generations of the Latino community to be brought to places like Mt. Rainier to help with programming by sharing the history of the place, and providing information about the area and their lives.

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- The museums in the Yakima Valley need to share the stories of the farm workers, through visual and audio presentations. Radio KDNA could be played at a kiosk at the museum, so people would be able to connect that element of the community back to the culture and the history.

## **Panel Responses:**

- Latino components can be added to existing festivals and events and include opportunities for the telling of the story of Latino culture in the Yakima Valley. Mt. Rainier Park can work to connect and share programming between the Park and the Yakima Valley.

## **Question: What Types Of Heritage-Related Programs Would Be Appealing To Latino Youth And Their Families?**

### **Recommendations:**

- There are many heritage-related programs already, but they need to be bilingual. Bilingual tour guides in places such as Mt. Rainier National Park, will help Latino families feel more welcome and engaged. To promote available programs, information can be distributed with fliers or magazines in places that Latinos commonly gather in their communities. Something that would be appealing to Latino families is a fiesta with food, music and dancing. Everyone would be welcome, and the history and culture should be shared through a fun activity.
- The students pointed out that in Mexico, Latino culture and traditions are represented everywhere you go through the surroundings; the history is ever-present. This is not the case in the US for Latino culture, so a special effort must be made to help it be better represented.
- A highlight for some students at the Youth Summit was the amount of “firsts” they were able to experience: snow, visiting a radio station, a working orchard, historic murals, and a national park. Firsts can be an important element of connecting culturally. Programs like the Youth Summit can also open opportunities for students by exposing them to job opportunities in fields that focus on culture and history that the students otherwise might not have been aware of.

“We don’t get to hear about the Park Service jobs in my school area -- we would like to have the Park Service personnel come into the community and let them know what you do so we can be inspired.”

“As Latinos we love to see our people work. We chat with them and let them know we are family. We would like to see them work. I realize that by seeing people work in many jobs I know that we can do other jobs and I don’t have to work at McDonalds. I know that I can be something better if I work hard. This Youth Summit inspired me to know I could work hard and do something special with my life.”

## **Question: How can students and youth be better mobilized and involved to save historic places that matter?**

### **Youth Recommendations:**

- We don’t necessarily need more programs, we just need to make the existing ones better. To improve these programs, students can volunteer, perhaps as bilingual tour guides. To engage students, the schools

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must be connected with the park programs and other historic places through the help of school boards, educators, and elected officials.

Provide service opportunities and hands-on learning:

**“As a Youth Summit member I want to work and do hands on work preserving a place. It makes me more passionate about saving it.”**

**“When we have experience doing something at a place, we learn and remember more about the place. Everyone has a different way of learning. We need to let people do, see, taste, smell, and understand the place in many different ways.”**

Work on youth-focused marketing:

**“I think that being able to visit the historic sites is extremely difficult at times because we don’t know that they are there or why they are important. We need to make this easier.”**

## **Panel Responses:**

- It is hugely important to National Parks that everyone feels a connection. Students are needed as a part of the national parks through volunteer work, visitation, or summer jobs; it is a place you can experience over your lifetime. Historic places are powerful, and students can play a role in conveying the important stories and meaning.

- Students should reach out and follow up with leaders and peers from this Youth Summit, and make sure contact information is shared.

- If the students have a place that is important to them and their culture, they should contact the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation—they can help protect these places.

**“In the last few days you have created a community together and we want you to continue to connect over time and we want you to build your own community for this generation.”**

Throughout the Youth Summit, other ideas and recommendations were expressed—or not shared—but planted as a seed of inspiration. With a commitment to continue the Youth Summit in 2013, students and preservation leaders in Washington State will be able to continue this momentum.

See the attached packet of information and visit the Washington Trust website at [www.preservewa.org/](http://www.preservewa.org/) for more information and links to highlight film and photos.